

Charlottetown, PE
Dailies (1077)
Circulation: 23,000
23 Jan 99 1102406
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Time to get with the program

Technology expert urges adults to become more comfortable with today's technology

BY DOUG GALLANT
Guardian Weekend

Many Canadians over the age of 40 are intimidated by changing technology because their initial exposure to technology was anything but a positive experience, says noted author and Internet expert Jim Carroll.

Carroll, author of *Surviving The Information Age*, says a bad experience with technology makes people reluctant to explore new developments which could, in a number of instances, simplify their lives.

"We baby boomers... there are a lot of us that are freaked out by new technology because of what we grew up with," Carroll said in a recent interview.

"First time we had a computer, it was the punch card, the big mainframe, it was phone bills for \$7 million, things like that. There are a lot of horror stories about people who've had an ugly exposure to technology. That's very different from what our kids get today. They just see this friendly little machine that says 'hi' when they turn it on and smiles at them."

Regardless of how challenged one may feel by today's technology, the fact remains that it's there and it can't be ignored in virtually all areas of society.

Regardless of what your dealings are, regardless of whether you're a technocrat or technologically challenged, you have to get involved because it's not going away.

"If anything, it's going to get

worse. It's been said that 80 per cent of the technology we'll use in 10 years has yet to be invented, so we're going to be dealing with a lot of new things."

Carroll says technology, and in particular the Internet, is changing the way many people do their jobs, changing the economy and, in a number of cases, changing people's day-to-day lives.

mers on contract and they can be located anywhere."

That kind of scenario bodes well for places like Prince Edward Island and the rest of the Maritimes, Carroll says.

"You're going to see a whole de-urbanization process taking place where people are saying 'I can work anywhere, so I'm going to set up my electronic cottage at Cavendish

ticularly good job of explaining that technology to the public.

Some fail to recognize that a significant percentage of the population feels challenged by the technology or, in the extreme, just plain dislikes technology.

"If the technology crowd is to get people involved, they have to work harder to recognize where people are challenged and work harder to get them outside."

The Nova Scotia-born author says that while much has been accomplished in the field of information technology, so much more remains to be uncovered and developed which will increase productivity and enhance people's lives.

"The productivity capabilities are staggering. The research skills, the ability to effectively harness knowledge from the net will be one of the key skills of the 21st century.

"I call it just-in-time knowledge. The economy is becoming so specialized, the world is becoming so specialized and our jobs are becoming so specialized that we're going to have a new career every second week, given what's going on out there," he notes.

"The ability to quickly learn about something just like that is going to be very, very important."

Carroll noted that the vast amounts of information available to him on the Internet enable him to address very specific issues for the groups and organizations to which he is contracted to speak.

"I do a lot of consulting work and I use the Internet extensively to learn about who I'm dealing with and what the issues are for them. I think that's going to be one of the most important things we can teach ourselves."

And Carroll says people should recognize that the rate of change is only going to accelerate in the years to come.

As to emerging trends, he says he expects to see a continuing move towards open source computing.

"The minds of the brightest technical developers around the world are now getting into this mindset of 'let's

take this product and develop it and enhance it for the fun of it and give it away for free."

"That's the way the net was developed. Now they're doing that with regular software."

"I think there's something really profound there. It's going to change our whole concept of computing, how we get software and the way where we get software."

Another major development, Carroll says, is the growth of business in the area of business electronic commerce.

"On-line shopping, that's not particularly significant. What is going on is business is saying to other businesses that we're going to streamline our purchase order process, we're going to streamline our inventory process, we're going to extend the reach of our corporate networks to your corporate networks via the net and do business."

"That's going to be a steamroller. That's going to completely change the way jobs are transacted in the economy. That's going to be a huge trend over the next several years."

Carroll says he's convinced that companies that are willing to embrace this changing technology will prosper at a rate much faster than those that don't.

He noted, for example, that GE (General Electric) has been aggressively involved in this process and has seen 30 per cent cost savings in some departments.

Carroll is the well-known co-author of 24 books which have sold almost 650,000 copies in Canada, including the national best-selling Canadian Internet Handbook.

In addition, Carroll writes weekly for the *Globe and Mail*, monthly for the marketing publication *Strategy* and, starting in January 1999, on a monthly basis for Canadian Airlines *Inflight* magazine.

He has also written articles for numerous other high profile journals and magazines.

His views have been sought out by CNN, CBC Business World and countless other media outlets in Canada and the United States.

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- Jim Carroll

He noted, for example, that a lot of companies are downsizing and that with downsizing, companies have found themselves in situations where they've been forced to make personnel choices based on how people adapt to change.

"They've got a 58-year-old who's freaked and stressed by technology and they've got a 20-year-old who can write code in his sleep. Who are they going to get rid of? Increasingly it's the 58-year-old."

Carroll, a native of Halifax, is a prime example of what he calls today's nomadic worker.

"There are a lot of people out there today like myself. I don't have a job. I haven't had one in eight years. Instead, I hire myself out to various companies and organizations on a regular basis. E-mail, the Internet, websites have become significant

tools in allowing me to undertake that work."

The high technology sector is already nomadic worker-based, he suggests.

"Companies based in Toronto don't hire employees, they hire program-

Beach and plug in and do my work there instead of living in Toronto."

Technology, he suggests, is reaching into every aspect of our lives, playing a role in everything from how we shop and where we spend our vacations to what schools our children go to and what the next family car will be.

It is also changing the face of a number of industries, including primary industries like agriculture.

"There is something coming called precision farming. This is real. Your tractor will be equipped with a little device connected to a GPS (geographic positioning system) that's going to talk to a satellite in the sky, that's going to talk to Monsanto which has a data base of the entire pesticide application for that particular square metre last year and will compare that to the yield and adjust the pesticide spraying accordingly as it drives around the field.

"It's going to be linked to data bases that can make all manner of adjustments."

The whole farming industry, he says, is becoming high tech, and people have to be prepared to deal with that.

Carroll says part of the problem with today's technology is that a number of those companies which create the technology don't do a par-